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PRONIA celebrated Easter with the Greek community



In the days leading up to Greek Easter a group of people busily prepared hampers for delivery. Traditional tsourekia, koulourakia (Easter cookies), and other goods were placed into bags and food parcels. The sounds and excitement of the preparations were in stark contrast with the quietness of the streets surrounding PRONIA's head office in the, usually, vibrant inner city suburb of Brunswick.

Over two hundred families and individuals received the Easter parcels during the Greek Orthodox Holy Week, a ray of hope in the tough times they are experiencing. Their isolation, vulnerability, hardship and health challenges have accentuated due to the restrictions. "It's not unusual for PRONIA to make Easter deliveries to the vulnerable, but this year we are facing unprecedented circumstances," Family and Community Services manager Mary Sophou said. "We managed to secure donations which made the tsourekia and food parcel deliveries possible," she says and states that in many cases, "for the recipients, it's the thought that they are not forgotten, that someone took the time to prepare a gift and that their table will have a tsoureki on Easter Day."

Ms Sophou said that there were plenty of humbling and moving moments for the nine teams of staff that delivered the tsourekia and food parcels across

metropolitan Melbourne. “Because of the restrictions, those already isolated, are experiencing acute loneliness and those who were not as isolated are now facing deteriorating circumstances with a very negative impact on their lives and their health.”

“For some of our clients, the staff who made the delivery were the only people they’d seen and spoken to in days. Sometimes a smile, a greeting, a ‘hronia polla’ is all it takes to make someone’s day,” PRONIA’s CEO Tina Douvos said.
“This year we saw an increased demand for emergency relief, especially around Easter time. It comes to us as no surprise, as people are losing their jobs, are on a temporary visa or relied on casual employment.”

Telephone calls by distressed elderly have become more frequent over the last few weeks. “Some ageing members of our community are concerned about their safety and wellbeing. They have expressed concern about how and who will look after them should there be a situation where food and provisions are scarce and /or they are not in position to care for themselves,” Ms Sophou said.

Many call asking for help. PRONIA’s case workers, social workers and psychologists provide advice and support to those who are isolated and/or emotionally impacted by COVID-19 conditions. Apart from the emotional support, caseworkers also explore if the caller has sufficient food and other provisions and make the necessary arrangements to ensure the caller’s life becomes a little easier.

The pandemic has increased the volume of calls from people who are on temporary visas. They seek financial assistance and migration advice as they explore their status options in the new reality of COVID 19. “PRONIA has received calls from tenants, mostly people on temporary visas, with concerns that they would be evicted, amidst other serious considerations about finances and loss of employment,” Ms Sophou said. They keep PRONIA’s lawyers and migration agents busy.
In the meantime, a generous donation from the Tsalikidis Family for Easter celebrations kept the spirit of resurrection alive this year and put a tsoureki on the table for many families on Easter Day.
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